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LEADER OF ALIEN SMUGGLING ORGANIZATION PLEADS  
GUILTY TO IMMIGRATION CONSPIRACY IN FEDERAL COURT

DAVID N. KELLEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that GJON BERISHA pled guilty today in Manhattan federal court before United States District Judge WILLIAM H. PAULEY to leading an alien smuggling organization (the "BERISHA Organization"). As alleged in an Indictment, the BERISHA Organization was responsible for illegally smuggling and attempting to smuggle hundreds of individuals from Eastern Europe into the United States between January 2000 and August 2003, and charged the illegal immigrants over \$2.5 million in smuggling fees during that three-year period.

BERISHA was charged in an eighteen-count Indictment in August 2003, along with other members of the Organization. On October 13 and October 14, 2003, Special Agents from the

Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE") arrested several of the members of the BERISHA Organization including, GJON BERISHA, VINCENT BERISHA, FRANK BERISHA, PJETRO DUSHAJ, DED GJOLAJ, LINDA DUSHAJ.

As alleged in the Indictment, and in prior court proceedings, a two-year investigation into the BERISHA Organization by Special Agents from ICE, revealed that members of the BERISHA Organization utilized a complex network of international participants including airport officials, police officers, and travel agents, to move the immigrants to the United States. The immigrants were transported by various means, including commercial airlines, buses, taxis, and cars. The smugglers provided the immigrants with false European passports for boarding of commercial aircraft in Europe and South America in order to circumvent visa regulations and to give the appearance that the immigrants were affiliated with travel groups. The Indictment alleged the smugglers would fly with the groups of aliens; other times they would put them on planes and meet them at the next country of destination. The smugglers allegedly routed the immigrants through Eastern Europe and Western Europe, into South America and then to Mexico for the final staging before entering the United States illegally across the Rio Grande River into Texas.

The BERISHA Organization charged the illegal immigrants as

much as \$12,000 in this scheme. During the journeys, the smugglers are accused of employing intimidation tactics, threatening to harm the immigrants or members of their families if the BERISHA Organization did not receive payment.

VINCENT BERISHA and LINDA DUSHAJ both previously pled guilty to Count Ten of the Indictment before Judge Pauley.

GJON BERISHA, VINCENT BERISHA and LINDA DUSHAJ each face a maximum of ten years' imprisonment as a result of their pleas. GJON BERISHA is currently detained.

Mr. KELLEY praised the efforts of the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement for its work in this case.

Assistant United States Attorneys MICHAEL M. PURPURA and MIRIAM E. ROCAH are in charge of the prosecution.

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